

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 6021

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UR, SY
SUBJ: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ASAD VISIT TO MOSCOW

REF: MOSCOW 5777

SUMMARY: MFA BRIEFING ON ASAD VISIT TO MOSCOW ADDS SOME
COLOR AND DETAIL TO PREVIOUS REPORTS, BUT DOES NOT PROVIDE
ANY SURPRISES. SYRIANS DID INDICATE THEIR WILLINGNESS
TO CONSIDER SEPARATE ARAB DELEGATIONS TO GENEVA CONFERENCE
ALTHOUGH THEY STILL PREFER THEIR IDEA OF A UNIFIED ARAB
DELEGATION. SOVIETS SEEM TO HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THEIR
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RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIANS, BUT ALSO SEEM PLEASED
THAT VISIT WAS "SUCCESSFUL" AND THAT PROSPECTS HAVE
BEEN OPENED FOR GOING BEYOND PAST DIFFICULTIES OVER
LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF WAS BRIEFED ON VISIT ON APRIL 29 BY MFA
N.E. COUNTRIES DEPT., FIRST SECRETARY A. I. ZOTOV

(SYRIA-LEBANON). ZOTOV PREFACED HIS REMARKS ON THE TALKS BY EMPHASIZING THE "INVISIBLE BACKGROUND" OF LEBANON. HE DESCRIBED AT SOME LENGTH THE INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES WHICH ASAD HAD FACED BECAUSE OF THE LEBANESE INTERVENTION -NUMEROUS COUP ATTEMPTS, THE FORMATION OF FACTIONS WITHIN THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY (SOME OF WHICH FAVORED A PRO-IRAQI POLICY), AND ECONOMIC DISLOCATION. LAST AND NOT LEAST, HE ADMITTED, WERE THE BILATERAL PROBLEMS WHICH AROSE BECAUSE OF SOVIET OPPOSITION TO THE INTERVENTION. THE VISIT WAS SUCCESSFUL IN THAT THE TWO SIDES AGREED, WITHOUT REALLY DISCUSSING LEBANON, TO SURMOUNT THE DIFFICULTIES IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP CAUSED BY LEBANON. ZOTOV INDICATED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE SURPRISED BY THE VEHEMENCE OF ASAD'S DEFENSE OF THE INTERVENTION IN HIS APRIL 18 SPEECH TO BREZHNEV SINCE THE TWO SIDES HAD AGREED IN ADVANCE TO AVOID POLEMICS ON LEBANON. HE EMPHASIZED THAT LEBANON HAD BEEN TOUCHED ON ONLY BRIEFLY DURING THE TALKS AND THAT THE ONLY REAL DISCUSSION CAME DURING THE WORKING LEVEL NEGOTIATIONS ON THE COMMUNIQUE. TO EMBOFF'S COMMENT THAT HE HAD NOT EXPECTED SOVIET SIDE TO GO SO FAR IN COMMUNIQUE AS IT DID, HE REPLIED ONLY THAT SYRIAN SIDE HAD WANTED EVEN MORE. COMMENT: SYRIANS HERE SAY THEY WANTED PHRASE "WARMLY WELCOME" VICE COMMUNIQUE'S "NOTED WITH SATISFACTION". END COMMENT

2. ON BROAD ISSUE OF THE ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS, ZOTOV SAID SOVIET WERE "SOMEWHAT DISAPPOINTED" THAT
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SYRIANS WERE NOT WILLING TO DEFINE MORE PRECISELY THEIR NEGOTIATING OPTIONS. SYRIAN FOREIGN POLICY, HE COMPLAINED, HAD A HAPPENSTANCE (KON'YUNKTURNIY) QUALITY TO IT. AT THE MOMENT, THE SYRIANS WERE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE POSSIBLE RESULTS OF A GENEVA CONFERENCE, THUS, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE WILLING TO GO TO GENEVA, THEY DID NOT SEEM TO BE INTERESTED IN SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF THE STEPS NECESSARY TO GET THERE. THEY WERE VERY HARD, FOR EXAMPLE, ON THE ISSUE OF PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATION. ON THE OTHER HAD HE NOTED TAT THE SYRIANS HAD SAID THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATE ARAB DELEGATIONS AT GENEVA ALTHOUGH THEY STILL FAVORED THEIR OWN IDEA OF A UNIFIED ARAB DELEGATION.

3. ASKED ABOUT SPECIFICS OF THE DISCUSSIONS ON THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, ZOTOV SAID THAT WHILE NO CONCRETE DECISION HAD BEEN MADE WITH REGARD TO DEBT RESCHEDULING, SOVIETS HAD AGREED TO STUDY

PROBLEM. HE ADMITTED THAT THIS WOULD BE CONSIDERED FROM THE POLITICAL AS WELL AS THE ECONOMIC ASPECT AND HE IMPLIED THAT SOME POSITIVE GESTURE ON THIS MATTER WOULD BE MADE BY SOVIETS. HE ALSO INDICATED A CERTAIN CYNICISM, SAYING THAT ARABS ALWAYS WANTED TO STRETCH OUT TERM OF DEBT PAYMENTS NO MATTER HOW WELL OFF THEY WERE. ZOTOV SAID THAT TEXT OF SOVIET-SYRIAN ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT (REFTEL) WAS STILL IN HANDS OF STATE COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMIC RELATIONS. HE CONFIRMED GENERAL AREAS OF AGREEMENT REPORTED REFTEL AND ADDED THAT SYRIANS HAD PUSHED HARD FOR SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING IRON AND STEEL FACTORY DUE TO RISING WORLD PRICE FOR METAL.

4. ON MILITARY SIDE, ZOTOV, AS USUAL, REFUSED TO GO INTO DETAIL, BUT HE DID STATE THAT HE SAW NO PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE IN LACK OF MILITARY REPRESENTATION IN ASAD'S DELEGATION. THERE WERE SYRIAN MILITARY EXPERTS HERE AT TIME, HE SAID, AND THEY HAD TECHNICAL TALKS WITH THEIR SOVIET COUNTERPARTS, BUT ASAD'S DELEGATION PER SE WAS QUITE SMALL IN SIZE.

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5. ASKED ABOUT REPORTS OF SYRIAN INTEREST IN AMELIORATING THE POOR SOVIET-EGYPTIAN RELATIONSHIP, ZOTOV SAID THAT THE SYRIANS HAD NOT RAISED THIS IN A SERIOUS MANNER AND DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE EXPECTED A FAVORABLE SOVIET RESPONSE. FIRST, HE SAID THE SOVIETS AND THE EGYPTIANS CAN SORT OUT THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIP WHENEVER THERE IS ANY REALISTIC POSSIBILITY FOR THIS, SECOND, THE SYRIANS PROBABLY LIKE (AS DID THE EGYPTIANS IN THEIR TIME) BEING THE CHIEF ARAB PARTNER OF THE SOVIET UNION AMONG THE CONFRONTATION STATES, AND, THIRD, THEY MAY PREFER TO KEEP SOVIET-EGYPTIAN DIFFERENCES ALIVE TO BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT THESE IN THEIR OWN INTERESTS SHOULD THE NEED ARISE.

6. COMMENT: ZOTOV LEFT IMPRESSION THAT VISIT HAD NOT BEEN EASY, BUT THAT BOTH SIDES HAD DETERMINED IN ADVANCE TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP AND THAT THIS BASIC GOAL HAD BEEN MET. HIS COMMENTS ON SOVIET "DISAPPOINTMENT" WITH SYRIAN UNWILLINGNESS TO GET DOWN TO SERIOUS DISCUSSION ON PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH MOVEMENT TOWARD OVERALL SETTLEMENT ARE INTERESTING. ZOTOV SAID SOVIETS HAD EXPERIENCED SIMILAR DIFFICULTIES IN TRYING TO PIN DOWN POSITION OF PLO LEADER ARAFAT DURING HIS RECENT VISIT. THESE DIFFICULTIES, IF TRUE,

MAY IN TURN MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR GROMYKO
TO SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY ON NUANCES OF PRESENT ARAB
AND PALESTINIAN POSITIONS AT MAY 18 MEETING IN GENEVA
WITH SECRETARY.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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